

Blaxhall Village Newsletter



Winter 2025

Happy New Year!



2025 promises to be an exciting year, not least because the church is undergoing several months of renovations, the biggest project in at least 35 years and almost certainly the most expensive in its history.

Meanwhile, we've been joined by several new residents, of the feathered variety. Around a dozen swans, and a similar number of Egyptian Geese have been living on the field near the Village Hall for several weeks. Egyptian Geese have been resident in southern England for over a century, although they're quite a rare sight in Blaxhall. Personally, I think they're just here looking for their mummy ...



I know, it's nearly March, but it's our first Newsletter of 2025, so I think a Happy New Year is permitted. I hope this finds all our residents keeping warm and well as we embark on another Blaxhall year.

2024 went out in style, with another well attended and very much enjoyed Christmas party rocking the Village Hall.



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St Peter's Blaxhall: Tower renovation gets the GREEN LIGHT

Well Folks, you've done it! We are signing the contract this week and it's all systems go!

When we mention "green lights" the assumption is that as green follows amber which follows red in relatively quick succession. Not so when you have to juggle National Heritage Lottery grants, faculties (ecclesiastical planning permission), builders, bat surveys, Suffolk Historic Churches grants, VAT reclaim uncertainties, organ protection and encroaching trees! But Vincent Hunt (our Project Manager extraordinaire) is an expert juggler, and by the dint of tenacity, charm and a seemingly inexhaustible supply of optimism has turned 18 months' worth of amber light to green! HURRAH!

What does this mean for Blaxhall?

The conservative estimate is that the works will take 32 weeks. Personally, and knowing what excitements might lurk in the Tower (!), I am hoping for Harvest, but won't be surprised if it is Christmas! This really is a massive undertaking necessitating scaffolding inside and out (by far the largest single item in the budget). Inevitably, the Church will be out of bounds on a day to day basis. The Churchyard, however, will be safe to access and grave tending can continue as normal. We will stop work for funerals, but our monthly and Benefice services will be in the Village Hall; at the normal times. Rev Rob has PLANS for these so please keep an eye on the Ebb and Flow for further details.

What about THE FESTIVAL?

Again, we will be moving to the Village Hall. It won't be the same as usual, but rest assured, Sheila's ploughman's lunches and Church teas will be the same! We will be publishing the programme in the Ebb and Flow in April.

Any Questions???

Do get in touch with your nearest PCC member with queries:

Sheila Scopes, Stella Sokolis, Claire Peck, Maureen Martin, Joy Shaw, David Carrington, Vincent Hunt, Miranda Barclay (07958 780880). Joy can normally be found on Stone Common tending the sheep! They have moved house until the bulbs are over and the scaffolding is up.

IN THE VILLAGE HALL

18 February: Tuesday Communion 11am with coffee and cake.

2 March: Benefice Communion 10am with coffee and cake.

18 March: Tuesday Communion 11am with coffee and cake.

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The Parish Council

It has been a quiet time for the Parish Council but we still maintain a watch on the main issues affecting Blaxhall. The flooding problem has been attended to by local farmers and the District and County Councils and although there is always more to do, we continue our regular meetings with farmers, which have brought forward tangible results.

After some chivying and help from our county councillor Andrew Reid, we managed to get the county council to repair the Shape Road much quicker than they said was possible, so they must have had stern word with the badgers to make them leave the road alone.

We are putting together an emergency plan for Blaxhall and councillor Marie Cooke is leading and collating everything. More elsewhere in the newsletter.

Village Hall and Playing Field

Christmas seems a long time ago now but the memory of yet another enjoyable Christmas party still lingers. 'Handle With Care' entertained us with great music and a capacity crowd who were determined to enjoy themselves to the full made the evening fun and lucrative for the Village Hall coffers.

Those of you visiting the hall will have noticed the new L.E.D strip lights replacing the old fluorescents. Not only is the lighting improved but it brings the system up to modern standards including new emergency lights.

You may have also noticed a tidier look to the hall and playing field after an excellent spring clean by enthusiastic volunteers, sorting out the store rooms and the under stage area. Outside the paths have been trimmed as have the hedging and trees by the storage shed. Next on the agenda is getting the hall redecorated inside and out. We are looking for local contractors, so let me know if you have had a good experience with any painters. Any ideas on colours would also be appreciated.

The games afternoons including table tennis have been a great success with the last one on Sunday 23rd March but watch future newsletters for more details of what may follow in the summer months.

Please bear in mind the Village Hall is available to hire at very reasonable rates for Blaxhall residents, bookings are taken by Joyce Iszard 688452.

Graham

Let's Repair (to) the Church ...

See what I did there? By you time most of you read this the scaffolders "should" have liberally covered St. Peter's tower with a complex construction of tubes and boards, ready for the builders to begin several months of major repairs. We've already touched upon the tower's history a couple of times of this page, while the Church page has also kept readers up to date on the restoration project, but we still have a bit of ground to cover, so we're heading back for this edition.

I was reading an archaeologist's report that I'd largely forgotten about last week, dating from over a decade ago. It's quite brief, but interesting for a number of reasons. The excavation carried out at the time, to the west of the tower, revealed a pit below a slight hump, containing crushed building material, which they believed was likely to have been deposited during the major brick restoration/repair. They also dated that repair, to 1600-1700.

The pit full of crushed building materials is important, as it dispels a long standing myth which held that the hump in question was the site of a mass burial of plague victims. This in turn encouraged the tradition of Blaxhall originally being clustered around the church, before being abandoned during the plague years and sprouting back up around Mill Common. To the best of my knowledge, however, nobody has ever proffered any empirical evidence for such a scenario, and the myth itself only seems to have emerged early last century.

The next thing I found interesting was the reference to dressed limestone being mentioned amongst the rubble, as well as further pieces being buried near the now stopped-up west door. Why, I hear you ask, do I care about discarded lumps of dressed limestone? Well, it's like this, in the



northern wall of our cottage, (which is made of flint, and predates the brick southern end by several years), there are a couple of large sections of dressed limestone, that always had me wondering how they got there.

It obviously wasn't "found" in a field, like all the flint, nor was it specially imported from Normandy to be planted at random half way up the wall of a utilitarian labourers' cottage. The tempting conclusion, then, is that the said stones were left

History

over from the tower repairs. The tower, whether brick or flint, relies on dressed limestone for its quoins (see photo on page 5), and one can't help but postulate that the ones in our wall were either original, and too badly damaged in a tower collapse to re-use, or were surplus ones that were brought in for the rebuild but not needed, then perhaps sold off cheap, or even pilfered. What's also interesting, is that the rubble in the pit by no means constitutes the huge amount of flint that made up the part of the tower now built from brick, so did that also find its way to local cottages? This is all circumstantial, of course, and in no way proven, but it seems a very plausible hypothesis. Your homework, then is to examine your cottages, especially those made of flint, and see if you can find any similarly incongruous pieces of limestone. If you find any, please let me know!

Moving on to the next reason the report was interesting, I'm afraid it's an instance of your writer being a tiny bit smug. The reason, is the date. Many years ago I had heated discussions with two other members of the Blaxhall Archive group about the date of the big brick repair, which they were certain was 1850-1900, but I reckoned was late 1600s to mid 1700s. Having the experts place it at 1600-1700, nearer to my estimate, is a teensy-weensy bit satisfying!

Finally, you may remember that a couple of years ago I wrote an item about the 18th century brick tomb that was discovered below the Pope family monument near the porch during excavations for the new drains. It turns out that a roof of a possible second burial vault was also discovered, to the south-east of the church, but not excavated. Given the importance and financial resources of various former residents it does seem almost certain that there must be other vaults, either under the churchyard, or church itself.

The Saunders family, for example, are extensively described in the elaborate monument pictured above-right, and apparently "buried here". It's unlikely they're propped up in the wall, so must be either under the church floor, or in the graveyard. They may just have been buried in the way we think of the term today, but that only became the done thing in the 1800s, prior to which it was quite common for anyone who could afford it to have a family vault under their parish church. Who knows then, what might be under our feet?



THE PRODUCE SHOW AT BLAXHALL FETE 9TH AUGUST 2025

It would be nice to hope the Spring planting season is going to arrive soon, so please bear in mind what you could enter into the Produce Show this year when planning your garden or allotment. We will be having the usual mix of classes - and maybe a few new ones - and hope to have a wonderful display of fruit, veg and flowers

After the success of last year's 'Bring and Buy Sale' we will be repeating this at the Fete this year, so again please bear this in mind, for example if you have made marmalade could you spare a jar or two please, or do you have any surplus plants or cuttings? All contributions are more than welcome.

If you have any questions please contact me on 07769 830676 or email hallfarmhoo@hotmail.com

Thank you
Evelyn Parkinson

(Continued from page 2)

15 April: Tuesday Communion 11am with coffee and cake.
19 April: Saturday EASTER GARDEN and Easter Egg Hunt in the Churchyard 3pm. And sneaky look at the building works!
27 April: Benefice Communion 10am with coffee and cake.
20 May: Tuesday Communion 11am with coffee and cake.
17 June: Tuesday Communion 11am with coffee and cake. And probably last minute Festival planning!
29 June: FESTIVAL SERVICE! Celebration of St Peter's Day. Coffee, cake and lots more!
15 July: Tuesday Communion 11am with coffee and cake.
19 August: Tuesday Communion 11am with coffee and cake.
16 September: Tuesday Communion 11am with coffee and cake.
21 October: Tuesday Communion 11am with coffee and cake.

That's all for now, folks! Watch this space for updates and changes and come to the Village Hall every time you need more cake!!!

Ship Update

The Ship Inn at Blaxhall has survived another winter thanks to local support, the hard work of manager Lauren and her staff and, not least, the continuing faith of the owner in these hard times for hospitality.

The effort seems to have allowed a historic and rare example of social history to provide good fellowship, good entertainment and the kind of parties that rare in our own homes!

The owner and staff are in buoyant mood and we can announce that a full menu is now available for lunch and supper seven days a week.

The team has been joined by 'Darren and Carly Given' who are excellent chefs with a substantial history of catering success in larger and more important venues than the old Ship Inn.

This will allow us to cater for bigger and better events at the Blaxhall Ship including private functions.

We are attempting to make the most of the old Ship's reputation for music and arts with entertainment most Sunday afternoons, every Monday afternoon and many other events.

The latest addition to our events is 'The Spoken Word'. This is to be monthly on a Thursday evening and an opportunity for poets, readers and authors to find an audience for their talents and the fellowship and support of the many who enjoys the literary arts.

Please come and Support your Pub.

Terry Davey (owner)

Newsletters Online

Many of you will be aware that I started uploading the old newsletters to the Issue website a couple of years ago. Unfortunately, Issue have now restricted the number of files you can upload without paying them a small fortune, so I've moved our little library to archive.org. It's a bit slower and can be a slight faff for phone users, but it works pretty well on PCs/laptops and is totally free, so will serve as a stop-gap until a better option can be found. Just visit archive.org and enter "blaxhall newsletter" (without the quotes) in the main, central search bar. (Be sure not to put an s on newsletter, as it's enough to throw the search off!)

Volunteers Needed

In case of an emergency in Blaxhall

If we had an incident such as major flooding, heavy snow, a hurricane or a heath fire we may need to activate our emergency plan.

We would need to be able to gather information quickly from around the village and provide information to our residents as well as liaise with the council and emergency services.

We may need to clear snow or other obstacles.

If people need to evacuate their homes they may need help to do so and we may need to open a rest centre to provide a safe space, warmth, food and drinks.

We need people and equipment to achieve this. Local farmers are willing to help and we have a couple of Area Co-ordinators – but need more.

PEOPLE

Local Area Co-ordinators – to be an essential communication link between their neighbours and the Lead Co-ordinator. Also to provide information on the local situation and any help that may be required.

Rest Centre Co-ordinator – To welcome those attending the rest centre and organise volunteers as well as liaise with the Lead Co-ordinator. The council provide training.

Rest Centre Volunteers – To distribute food & drinks, and possibly administer first aid.

First Aiders – anyone with first aid training, or willing to be trained.

EQUIPMENT

Chain saws

Pumps

Generators

4WD Vehicles

If you are able to help with any of the above roles or equipment please contact us via our Parish Council Clerk Joanne Peters: blaxhallparishclerk@gmail.com

Roads Update

As part of the ongoing efforts to reduce flooding and sand/mud on the road, Jon Cutting and Graham Atkinson from Blaxhall PC met with Will Brice from Newshoots earlier in February, to discuss the latest developments and plans. We haven't got room to print the detailed summary here, but you can request it by emailing shane@blaxhall.com or jon@blaxhall.com

In brief, the productive discussion primarily included the subjects of: 1) further hedge planting to help counter water escaping over the bank in areas such as the road near Lime Tree Farm. 2) continued work to reduce field entrance run-off by either moving or modifying several of the field entrances in question.

Photos

Several of our new, feathered friends can be seen below, while volunteers have done a great job tidying around the Village Hall.



Games Afternoons

The popular games afternoons at the Village Hall have two dates left before their summer break. They are: Sunday February 23rd 2:30pm-4:30pm & Sunday 23rd March 2:30pm - 4:30pm.

Blaxhall Bicycle Club (BBC)

Blaxhall's recently formed cycle club is planning to restart its activities in March. If you missed our item in the last newsletter and are interested in joining or finding out more, please WhatsApp message David on 07876568135.

A Busy Winter for BCOST

BCOST supporters have been very active over the winter to date. A series of work parties at Stone Common have cleared the vegetation from around the perimeter hedging, checked and replaced canes and rabbit guards as necessary, and added a horse manure mulch to some stretches.

Additional young whips have been added to replace any saplings that have died and to thicken up the planting. It is pleasing to see that the hedge is mostly alive and doing well. At Jasper's Pightle we completed the raking of cut bracken and have similarly cleared around and added mulch to the hedge that was planted in 2022/23. We are grateful to everyone who has joined in our work parties.



Local residents may have noticed that areas of Stone Common are now being grazed by sheep as part of the process of habitat maintenance. Grazing and trampling by livestock helps to deter the regrowth of bracken and to restore a healthy, mixed acid grassland sward.

In celebration of the fruit trees planted at the Playing Field and at Stone Common in 2022, BCOST held a 'wassail' on Saturday 18 January. This tradition involves hanging toast on the twigs of fruit trees (reputedly to attract robins which will eat parasitic insects) and pouring a libation of cider around their roots – all accompanied by the banging of saucepans and the singing or chanting of wassail verses. We toasted the trees at the playing field before processing, with banging of pans, to Stone Common to toast the trees there. We ended the event with a celebratory bonfire and mulled cider.

Finally, a request. Is anyone employed by a firm which operates a 'Corporate Social Responsibility'

programme, sending staff out to volunteer for local charities? If so, we would love to be put forward or to receive details so that we can apply to be included, to bolster our work party schedule for next winter. I'm sure your colleagues, especially those that live in towns, would love to have a day off in Blaxhall doing conservation work, out in the fresh air raking bracken or planting and maintaining hedges! If your firm has a programme of this kind, please contact Eve at everossor@gmail.com.

(We are holding another work party at Stone Common on Feb 23 at 2pm. to plant hedging and remove more wire fencing.

This is shortly after the newsletter goes out - but if you're reading this in time, you'd be welcome to join us. Strong gloves, spades/trowels and wire cutters useful!)





Parish Councillors

Graham Bowles	01728 688192 (Chairman)	Karen Baker	01728 688200
Shane Pictor	01728 885215	Ray Herring	01728 746337
Jonathan Cutting	01728 885115	Mark Oakley	01728 687507
Graham Atkinson	01728 687589	Maria Cooke	
Joanne Peters	01394 459400 (Parish Clerk)	Tom Maltby	

Suffolk Coastal District Councillor - Tim Wilson 07823 587947 tim.wilson@east-suffolk.gov.uk

Suffolk County Councillor - Andrew Reid 07545 423799 andrew.reid@suffolk.gov.uk

Copies of minutes and agendas can be found at <http://blaxhall.onesuffolk.net/parish-council/>

Parish Council meetings are held in the Village Hall at 7.30 and are open to all parishioners, the public and press. The 2025 dates are: **Wednesday 8th January, Wednesday 5th March, Wednesday 7th May, Wednesday 2nd July, Wednesday 3rd September and Wednesday 5th November.**

Community Transport – “Connecting Communities” **01728 635938** The service booking line operates 08.45am to 4pm, Mon-Fri. You can book a pick-up with “Katch” bus service by using the app, or by phoning **01728 554455**.

Blaxhall Commons & Open Spaces Charitable Trust – www.blaxhallcommonstrust.org
For contact details of all trustees ring Mark Oakley 01728 687507

The **Mobile Library** traditionally comes to Blaxhall, and stops at **The Youth Hostel** once every four weeks. There is some confusion over communicated plans for 2025, however, so please contact the email or number below.

Large print, Audio & Childrens' books, also CDs and DVDs are available for a small charge.
Contact Pete Wells or Helen Hudson on help@suffolklibraries.co.uk, visit the website <http://suffolkreads.onesuffolk.net/libraries-and-mobiles/> or phone **01473 584563**

To put something in the Village Noticeboard, please ring Graham Bowles 01728 688192
To put something in the Newsletter email to shane@blaxhall.com tel. 01728 885215

Allotment information contact Sophie Martin on 07724 356916, Blaxhall.Allotments@gmail.com

Tree Warden - Joy Shaw, joyjoyshaw@gmail.com, 01728 688309

Previous newsletters can be found online at [archive.org \(search “blaxhall newsletter”\)](http://archive.org/search.php?query=blaxhall+newsletter)

Newsletter Contact shane@blaxhall.com

Deadline for next Newsletter - 10th May